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"The Highest Type of Disloyalty": The Struggle for Americanism in Louisiana During the Age of Communist Ascendancy, 1930s-1960s

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“The Highest Type of Disloyalty”: The Struggle for Americanism in Louisiana
During the Age of Communist Ascendancy, 1930s-1960s

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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In
The Department of History

By

Ryan Buchanan Prechter

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to show the pattern of red-baiting used in the United States to counter various forms of “subversive” social change. The paper illustrates how the issue of anti-communism was used as a political tool on the national level, and this tactic would trickle down to the state and local level, specifically into the public school systems. Focusing on Orleans Parish public schools, the narrative of red-baiting and anti-communist rhetoric is brought to life through the trials of Fortier High School. This study will chronicle how teachers became the tools of nation-building through state-sponsored “Americanism” programs. Students of Fortier and other high schools in the region were taught that to be American means specifically not to be Communist. This then is a contribution to the continuity of the politics of anti-communism in the United States from the New Deal to the Cold War eras.

Americanism, Red Scare, Anti-communism, Louisiana, New Orleans, Fortier High School, Cold War, New Deal

Introduction

The United States has had an ambiguous relationship with the perceived threat of communism dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. The ebb and flow of anti-communism appears to rise and fall with periods of cultural and political tension and unease within the country. Though eras of deep anti-communist sentiment in the United States have been broken down structurally into titles such as “The First Red Scare,” “The Second Red Scare,” “The McCarthy Era,” and “The Cold War,” these names do not tell the whole story of how these sentiments evolved and why.

In American history the enemy is often equated with leftist movements. In the nineteenth century, the enemies were radical socialist immigrants that supported unions. With the advent of Bolshevik Russia during World War I, the perceived threat became bolshevism and communism. When communism was on the ascendency after the two world wars, America “saw red” and launched the two red scares. After World War I many self-declared patriots saw the threat to the American value system emanating from radical unionism.

After World War II, Senator Joseph McCarthy and his supporters saw the threat in the form of communist subversives inside the United States government endangering the nation from within. At the same time, the U.S. was fighting the new superpower, the Soviet Union, in a stand-off around the world and in a potentially civilization-ending nuclear arms race. These were the monsters being battled on the national, state, and local levels.

Whether as a means to assault the influx of immigrants into the country in the late nineteenth century, or as an attack on the anti-war left during World War II, the fear of

communism historically has become the lens through which much cultural and political evolution is viewed and the battleground on which change is tested.¹

One such battleground which has historically been a forum for cultural debate and repression lies in the nation's school systems. The care and shaping of young minds has traditionally been at the forefront of political campaigns from the city council to the president of the United States. Public schools have come under deep scrutiny and serious suspicion. Schools, serving as the last educational stage between childhood and adulthood, became a target during times of heightened anti-communism. The American school system faced serious changes in the inter-war period of the 1920s and 1930s; therefore, fear of change paralleled a marked increase in the fear of communism in the years before World War II and leading into the McCarthy and Cold War periods. While regional differences express different symptoms of the Red Scare, there is evidence that battles were being fought about the loyalty of school teachers and their curricula. The Orleans Parish public school system is a telling microcosm for these very battles which were fought around the country during this period, and suggest that during these times of unease in America, fear of communism will become the marker through which change is gauged.

This essay is a case study how the crusade against communism played out on the local level, particularly in one New Orleans area high school, namely Alcee Fortier. Before and during World War II, principals such as John R. Conniff tried to fight the perceived threat of communism by reinforcing the American value system ("Americanism") among young people. In the 1960s, Joseph S. Schwertz perceived the threat endangering America as coming from the civil rights movement and in the Vietnam protests. Meanwhile the Louisiana legislature launched a series of efforts in the early 1960s to reinforce Americanism in the schools

¹ Peter H. Buckingham, *America Sees Red: Anticommunism in America, 1870s to 1980s* (Claremont: Regina Books, 1988), p. 1.

via anti-communist curricula and public media campaigns. Instead of promoting clearly positive American values, the fight against communism was usually carried on as a negative crusade of what America did not want to be, namely communist.

Background

The historiography of anti-communism in the United States is immense, but not overwhelming. Reading through the literature, certain patterns emerge which paint a portrait of a country trying to define its identity by constantly comparing itself to what it is not; namely communist. Karl Marx's writings first appeared in the U.S. in the 1850s. His *Communist Manifesto* was first published in Europe in 1848, but it did not arrive in the United States until 1871, at the opportune moment when many laborers of the newly industrialized nation were more than willing to accept its teachings.² The growth of the Socialist Labor Party and other labor groups, which ranged from harmless protesters to secret violent organizations like the "Molly Maguires" caused those in power to fear a "communist conspiracy" in the country.³ So soon after the Civil War, this new fear of communism allowed the nation to avoid serious questions of self-identity at such a pivotal moment of social and political flux. At the same time, a large influx of immigrant laborers aroused suspicion because of the radical doctrines it was assumed they must have learned back home. Coupled with the deep social and economic changes of the period, the immigrants became an instant enemy to blame for any signs of instability. One

² Buckingham, *America Sees Red*, p. 3; for more background on the history of anti-communism, see also M.J. Heale, *McCarthy's American: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), p. 7; Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980); Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Guenter Bischof, "Before the Break: The Relationship Between Eisenhower and McCarthy, 1952-1953," MA thesis, University of New Orleans, 1980.

³Buckingham, *America Sees Red*, p. 4.

should note that this occurred long before the Soviet Union took shape, establishing the paradigm that would set the tone for all future Red Scares. Anti-communism in America is more of a metaphysical fear, or a “specter,” as historian Melvyn Leffler posits in his book *The Specter of Communism*. Leffler describes this fear as that which drives people’s actions and set the parameters for their framework of reality devoid of any tangible nation or enemy which may exist as an actual threat.⁴

The first official Red Scare began when America found itself suddenly without an enemy to fight overseas and facing economic turmoil at home. The end of World War I brought an end to military production which so benefited the nation’s economy during the war. With unemployment rising and tensions brewing, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer immediately blamed the worst enemy of progress he could find. He explained the country’s sudden problems on a “disease of evil thinking” which took the shape of communist ideology, and he promised to “rid the country of red agitators.”⁵ This immediately led to the Immigration Act of 1918, which called for the deportation of “alien anarchists,” yet used terms so vague that any person of foreign birth seen as associating with a suspected radical group could fall under its purview.⁶ After the war, American citizens were tired and left disappointed with the opportunities available to them back home. American sentiment toward leftist organizations, documented as being neutral before and during the war, changed, and Americans were much more willing to accept a domestic enemy which their nation’s leaders were telling them was the cause of their problems.⁷ This war weariness and the Bolshevik Revolution, which gave a face to this new enemy, set the framework for how America perceived cultural, political, and social change for decades to come.

⁴ Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: the United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), pp. vii-x.

⁵ Buckingham, *America Sees Red*, p. 19.

⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

Definitions of American national identity have traditionally been forged in the fires of social conflict. Not surprisingly, the classroom has played a major role in this American journey as one of the battlefields where the evolution of these abstract notions of identity have played out. If one looks at the patterns, American politics, social upheaval, and classroom dynamics intersect in clear and visible ways. William H. Jeynes, a historian on the American educational system, clearly maps out these links in his book *American Educational History*. He bluntly posits that the American Revolutionary War led to the nation growing concerned with education itself. Later, the American Civil War led the nation to realize it needed a “common set of values” to prevent the evils of slavery and the possibility of secession from being a possibility again. His study continues into the twentieth century, where he insists that World War I essentially defined our “modern” understanding of the public school system as “a need for common values.” However, by World War II, this set of common values was clearly changing, and the war forced Americans to view their own racism more clearly.⁸

To be sure, the social aspects of America’s growth are large parts of Jeynes’ analysis. While previous wars helped the country form a “set of common values,” by the middle of the twentieth century, the true essence of what it actually means to have common values certainly met its biggest test. This debate started decades before the outbreak of World War II, and it is still being argued and defined to the present day.

The 1930s were a confusing time for many. Advances in technology and progressive ideals appeared to push the boundaries of what America stood for. All these battles, in some fashion or other, played out in significant ways within the school system. Progressive challenges

⁸ William H. Jeynes, *American Educational History: School, Society, and the Common Good* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), p. 7.

to the status quo started popping up at every turn. Whether illustrated by the struggle for teacher unionization, the desegregation of teachers and students, or criticisms of the handling of World War II, the Korean War, or the Vietnam War, school systems across the land, with the intimate nature of their close proximity to the youth of America, served as a conduit through which these social struggles could find a voice. Schools also became a huge target for those with an investment in the status quo.

It is important to remember that the social issues faced by the school system, a few of which are mentioned above, did not play out in a bubble. Teacher unionization is not relegated to the 1930s, and the struggle for civil rights did not blossom in the 1950s. These differing issues, unique in their own right, did overlap and weave through the nation's consciousness over a long stretch of time, intertwining most obviously in the history of the American high school. Yet, just as conflict in America's past was met with a conscious attempt to define what it meant to actually be an American, these seemingly uncertain times were met with a fierce resistance, as it was now partnered with the rhetoric of anti-communism.

The history of Americanism, in essence an attempt to push a set of ideals and common beliefs of what in fact it means to be American, has a long history. If the promotion of Americanism is an attempt to define national identity, it must set in place concrete symbols as well as rituals.⁹ The steps of this process after the Civil War are transparent in their pattern of growing out of some perceived need to counter an outside threat. Precisely one day after the United States declared war on Spain in 1898 students in New York were forced to begin reciting the Pledge of Allegiance every day, six years after President Benjamin Harrison institutionalized

⁹ Mel van Elteren, *Americanism and Americanization: A Critical History of Domestic and Global Influence* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), p. 56.

its use as well as establishing Columbus Day.¹⁰ At this point, Americanization began to gain momentum, and the use of symbolic rituals such as the Pledge of Allegiance spread across the country. Sociologist and American intellectual historian Mel van Elteren puts it best when he describes these “self-conscious efforts of ‘self-Americanization’” as a “nationalist longing for an authentic indigenous culture.” This, perhaps, can only be accomplished by what he also calls a “national cultural protectionism.” Almost overnight, groups using symbols promoting this drive to “self-Americanization” exploded onto the national arena. One example is the American Flag itself, which only became standard in many public schools at the dawn of World War I.¹¹ The Knights of Columbus and the Daughters of the American Revolution are two groups who sought to legitimize these newly established national symbols and rituals.¹² By the beginning of the twentieth century, Americanism clearly could not exist for its arbiters without a common enemy which sought its ruin. Communism, as an ideology, was the perfect foil to the ideals of Americanism, and its use as a tool to fight anything which countered this sense of protectionism reached epic heights by the middle of the twentieth century, and has still not diminished as a weapon against progressive movements.

The Interwar Period

The fear of communism became a useful tool employed by critics of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s during the New Deal era. Politicians who oppose the expansion of social-welfare programs and the growth of regulatory agencies have a history of using the word “socialism” as a

¹⁰ Elteren, *Americanism and Americanization*, p. 56.

¹¹ Cecelia Elizabeth O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 231.

¹² Elteren, *Americanism and Americanization*, p. 57

pejorative to smear their opponents by evoking the fear of communist subversives.¹³ A vigilant opposition arose during the mid-1930s which fully employed this jargon when accusing the federal government of being “infested with Communists.” The trickle-down effect stemming from the elite crying “communism” became all too apparent in the rhetoric of anti-unionists, fundamental Protestants, the Ku Klux Klan, the American Legion, as well as anti-Semitic organizations.¹⁴ It is also important to note that during this period, in 1938, the House Un-American Activities Committee, or HUAC, was created and led by Martin Dies in order to investigate communist infiltration of New Deal programs. While its original incarnation was meant to keep an eye on possible German infiltration during World War I, the various committees which evolved over time narrowed their focus to communist subversives. The threat of German agents after the war waned, and the rise of Bolshevism spawned new possibilities for possible enemies of the state. What is so interesting about this sudden onslaught of anti-communist vigilance is the fact that, as Melvyn Leffler argues, the focus was on internal threats inside the United States with little concern over the threat of Bolshevism abroad.¹⁵

The drama which unfolded in the Orleans Parish public school system during the late 1930s served as a microcosm for the onslaught of attention paid to the “rooting out” of communism on the national scale during the same period, as well as illustrating as to the regional effects of this nation-wide crusade. Central to the war on communism within Orleans Parish schools is John R. Conniff, the first principal of Fortier High School, who began his Fortier career in 1931.¹⁶ His persecution of high school teacher and aggressive education reformer Sarah Towles Reed spanned decades and showed how the fear of communism was used to destroy lives

¹³ Leffler, *The Specter of Communism*, p. 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Donald E. Devore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans 1841-1991* (Hammond: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1991), p. 135.

and function as a “red herring” in stemming the tide of the progressive cultural and social changes which the school system and America as a whole was starting to go through.¹⁷ Yet, the Fortier story also illuminates the narrative of red-baiting as Conniff’s use of anti-communism and his advancement of Americanism continued far after the end of his and Sarah Reed’s tenure.

Loyalty Oaths and the Americanism Rule

Loyalty oaths have been used in the United States since the inception of the country. As a means of colonial nation-building, the Massachusetts Bay Colony drew up a loyalty oath as the first document ever printed in the new found colonies. George Washington recommended that every state should “fix upon some oath or affirmation of allegiance,” which, by 1778, is exactly what happened. The rise in usage of loyalty oaths parallels the nation’s relationship with the public school system inasmuch as focus would turn to both issues every time the United States went to war. The Civil War certainly led to more oath-taking, as did the First and Second World Wars. The Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities, or Lusk Committee, founded in 1919, further tightened the perceived bond between education and patriotic loyalty, decreeing that proper education itself was dependent on “the character and viewpoint of the teachers.” This, in turn, led to New York instituting loyalty oaths for teachers in 1921.¹⁸ A system based on loyalty cannot exist without shared values and an ideology to which one must be loyal, and loyalty, ideology, and education meet in the school system. School teachers were expected to espouse “Americanness” based on a sense of “shared beliefs.”¹⁹ As in colonial times,

¹⁷ Leslie Gale Parr, *A Will of Her Own: Sarah Towles Reed and the Pursuit of Democracy in Southern Public Education* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), p. 165.

¹⁸ Heale, *McCarthy’s Americans*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Ibid.

this was largely due to a desire to build strength through consensus, and it certainly put a hefty responsibility on the teachers of America to spread Americanism while at the same time turning them into targets of great suspicion. The teachers served as the tools of nation-building.²⁰

Red-baiting in public schools was hardly new, and had been severe during the years following the First World War. At this time, New York City was at the forefront of accusing teachers of anti-Americanism, with the state legislature of 1919 creating a commission to investigate communism in its schools.²¹ Warren G. Harding's Commissioner of Education pledged to eradicate "Communism, Bolshevism, and Socialism" from schools, and loyalty oaths were utilized for the first time. Though use of the oaths died out by the late 1920s, their resurgence played an integral part in the experience of Orleans Parish public school teachers in the late 1930s.²² Historian Leslie Gale Parr points out in her biography of Sarah Reed that there were a few teachers, such as the socialists who founded the American Federation of Teachers, who were proven to have ties to socialist and communist organizations, however the tool of red-baiting became useful to administrators in exploiting and manipulating their teachers, especially when teachers tried to unionize.²³ The term "communist threat" became increasingly broad and nebulous in the process. Whether or not teachers were communist subversives became a moot point. In 1937, Tulane University history professor H.C. Nixon was quoted in NOPSTA news, the circular distributed by the New Orleans Public School Teachers Association, stating that "a liberal today in the South might be defined as a person who has been called a Communist and isn't."²⁴

²⁰ Heale, *McCarthy's Americans*, p. 30.

²¹ Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, pp. 117-118.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

On March 8, 1936, Principal John R. Conniff addressed the students and faculty of Fortier High School and espoused the anti-communist rhetoric of the day. His speech serves as a benchmark for educators' attitudes toward communism during the second Red Scare after World War II, as Conniff bluntly stated that all subversives would be rooted out of his school. The wording employed was key to the theme of keeping the status quo in times of change, as the principal uses the word "loyalty" repeatedly in the 1936 speech:

Loyalty is the most valuable quality any human being can possess. Loyalty in the group of which he is a part, loyalty to the community in which he lives, loyalty to the state and country whose blessings he enjoys. Contrariwise, disloyalty and advocacy of Communist tendencies in any manner, shape, or form whatsoever, in this school or out of this school, is the highest type of disloyalty that is traitorous and treasonous to the principles and practices of all loyal and patriotic citizens of our city, of our state, and of our country.²⁵

In his speech, Conniff alluded to a radio broadcast given the night before by Lawrence A. Stone, the Secretary of the Louisiana Coalition of Patriotic Societies, Inc. (LCPS). Describing Stone as "one of our city's most valued, prominent, and patriotic citizens," Conniff recounted Stone's radio address on the perils of communism in the community. It is important to pay careful attention to the words Conniff used when describing Stone, as he mixes the words "valued," "prominent," and "patriotic" in the same sentence. The effect being Conniff's implication that patriotism is elevated to preeminence in the community. We can surmise through Conniff's language that Stone is a well-known and respected member of the New Orleans community, and it should be noted that Conniff threatened his teachers and students the

²⁵ Conniff Speech to Fortier Students and Teachers, March 8, 1936, found in "Baby Boom America Collection (1945-1970)" in the LOUISiana Digital Library.

day after the radio broadcast. The question is raised of just how prevalent these local civic organizations were whose purpose it was to eliminate communism from the community.

Prominent organizations such as the Louisiana Coalition of Patriotic Societies and their members were influential in setting the mood for anti-communist sentiment in the community. While no teachers would be censured for a couple years, the gauntlet was definitely thrown down where public values were defined, ushering in a new era of unease. On July 10, 1940, Clifton L. Ganus, president of The Young Men's Business Club, sent to Orleans Parish School Superintendent Nicholas Bauer a copy of a resolution "adopted by" the Club and submitted to the school board for adoption. The resolution called for the implementation of "extreme" precautions due to the "worldwide totalitarian revolution forcibly taking place" and that anyone

connected with the State and/or Orleans Parish Public School System who teaches or preaches un-American ideologies and/or belittles our American form of government in favor of totalitarian forms of government, upon being found guilty of these practices by duly constituted authorities, shall be discharged for disloyalty to our free American institutions and form of government.²⁶

Ganus, a prominent figure in the community, owned the popular chain of A&G Cafeterias and was a prominent member of the Church of Christ. He later founded Clifton L. Ganus High School in accordance with his church principles. His prominence as a businessman in the community attested to the fact that citizens of status had clout in matters of education and social norms, as well as defined public values.

²⁶ Letter from Clifton L. Ganus to Nicholas Bauer, July 10, 1940, Folder "Americanism Rule," Box 1, "General Files," Earl K. Long Library Special Collections [EKLSC], University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

It was not long until the LCPS, of which Lawrence Stone was the secretary, followed The Young Men's Business Club's request in September with their own push for Superintendent Bauer and the Orleans Parish School Board to "adopt a Rule prohibiting subversive work by teachers and all other employees of the Board."²⁷ The "Americanism Rule" proposed by the coalition added additional measures to the Young Men's Business Club (YMBC) proposal. To define what constituted subversion and prohibited "advising, urging, persuading, or inducing any pupil in the Public schools of New Orleans to join any group or organization" viewed as subversive.²⁸ This raises the question: who actually defines what is considered subversive? The definition was solidified through these resolutions and proposals, yet the trickle-down effect of the rhetoric on the national scene as it influenced emotions in New Orleans was evident. Those in a position of power applied the label of subversive to all activities they believed to be threatening to the status quo or progressive in nature. While the YMBC resolution merely called for the firing of those "in favor of totalitarian form of government", the CPSL broadened that definition to include those who advocated the "refusal to join or serve in the armed forces" or "defend the United States of America if it is invaded."²⁹

This push to initiate investigations into the influence of school teachers on their students came at a critical time in America. With this period marking the eve of America's involvement in World War II, all eyes were on a possible threat coming out of Europe. However, changes were occurring on the home front as well. Everything was coming under the microscope for possible change in the arena of school teaching in the 1930s. Teachers in New Orleans had been attempting to change antiquated school board rules for years, including rules prohibiting female

²⁷ Rule Suggested by The Louisiana Coalition of Patriotic Societies to the Orleans Parish School Board, September 18, 1940, Folder "Americanism Rule," Box 1, "General Files," EKLSC.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

teachers from being married to issues concerning the unionization of educators. Not all school board members agreed with the proposed new rules regarding Americanism. Internal conflict surfaced when school board member Isaac S. Heller sent a letter to Nicholas Bauer stating his fears concerning the constitutionality of the resolution in terms of limitations on free speech, and expressed the frivolousness of instituting a rule which relied on suspects incriminating themselves. Heller, no fan of communism, illustrated this point with the declaration that “anyone so twisted as to become a member of the Communist party would not hesitate to stultify himself by disavowing same.”³⁰ At the end of the day, however, even Heller jumped on board the wave of anti-communism by drafting his own version of the resolution that, in his estimation, cleaned up the constitutional questions he raised.

Bauer is a fascinating personage in the debate, as only decades earlier he was serving as assistant to Superintendent Warren Easton along with John Conniff. Conniff eventually quit his post after Joseph Gwinn was named to replace Warren Easton, instead of him. When Gwinn resigned in 1923, Bauer was immediately appointed to the position of Superintendent without any other candidate being considered. Bauer would go on to preside over a downslide in the quality of education during the Great Depression, as the school board would go into three million dollars of debt by 1932 and have to cut teacher salaries.³¹ He proved the reporter correct who foresaw when Bauer was hired that the school system would “go along in the old rut, perpetuating its faults.”³²

³⁰ Letter from Isaac S. Heller to Nicholas Bauer, September 26, 1940, Folder “Americanism Rule,” Rule Suggested by The Louisiana Coalition of Patriotic Societies to the Orleans Parish School Board, September 18, 1940, Folder “Americanism Rule”, Box 1, “General Files,” EKLSC.

³¹ Edith Ambrose, “Sara Towles Reed and the Origins of Teachers Unions in New Orleans,” MA thesis, University of New Orleans, 1991, p. 14.

³² Devore/Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, p. 168-69.

With the Orleans Parish School Board officially setting the date for consideration of the rule suggested by the CPSL for November 8, 1940, the floodgates suddenly opened for both sides of the debate to make themselves heard. On November 1, Eduard Lindeman, chairman of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the American Civil Liberties Union, sent an urgent letter to Henry C. Schaumberg, president of the Orleans Parish School Board, imploring him to reconsider the adoption of the Americanism Rule. He pointed out the fears educators faced since the first Red Scare after World War I because of regulations concerning alleged subversive activities. "Witch hunts" could punish teachers who belonged to "entirely legitimate organizations." Lindeman cut to the heart of the matter by raising a concern which resurfaced as Americanism courses were implemented in the post-World War II era. He said that "the particular conception of patriotism which marks the Coalition of Patriotic Societies may be used as a yardstick to judge the patriotism of others." He went on to describe this new barometer of Americanism as a slippery slope which once started, had no end.³³ The ambiguity of the definition of what constituted being an American - or patriotic - was the underlying thread which connected the entire narrative of the Red Scare experience. In many ways, what it meant to be American was defined as what it meant not to be communist, and vice versa. That paradigm of enforced patriotism became the framework for reality through which all other issues were measured. It is easy to see how the slide down the slippery slope, which Lindeman forecast in his letter, was possible and legitimate in the eyes of the community.

When the Orleans Parish School Board finally met to discuss and vote on the YMBC resolution, there was no shortage of passionate conviction from both sides of the argument. Those who supported the resolution spoke about the limits of free speech within the classroom,

³³ Letter from Eduard C. Lindeman to Henry C. Schaumberg, November 1, 1940, Folder "Americanism Rule," Box 1, "General Files," EKLSC.

as well as the dangerous effects “Isms” have had on the youth of New Orleans for too long. The discourse of the HUAC hearings was also reflected in the meeting, and epitomized in Dr. Joseph Menendez, Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, who declared that it was “a proven fact that the school system had been invaded.” Menendez went on to say that “The American Legion feels that every school teacher should salute and give the oath of allegiance.”³⁴ Logically, the assumption is that Dr. Menendez was describing communism when he spoke of the schools being “invaded.” A vague - yet - imminent threat was a theme that would continue in the discourse used to propose further legislation to combat communism.

The opposition was equally as passionate and well-represented. Dr. Harold N. Lee, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Newcomb College and President of the Louisiana League for the Preservation of Constitutional Rights, formed in response to the CPSL, led the charge resisting the resolution of enforced patriotism in New Orleans public schools. Pointing out the fundamental problem at the heart of the resolution, he explained that the issue of “patriotism” was a guise to mislead the Board. Furthermore, the resolution would not accomplish its intended goal, but would instead “become an instrument for persecution by dismissing teachers for undefined offenses.” Others, such as Isaac Heller, mirrored Lee’s argument, reiterating the claim that the resolution was pointless. Even beloved high school teacher Sarah Reed contended that the rule was a “step in the wrong direction.”³⁵ Yet, despite opponents’ fears of witch hunts and affronts to the Constitution, and opposition by the ACLU and teacher’s organizations, the resolution was finally adopted on January 10, 1941, with nearly the exact same wording as the CPSL’s initial resolution.³⁶

³⁴ “Americanism Rule Adopted By Board”, NOPSTA NEWS, January, 1941, 6, 7, EKLSC.

³⁵ NOPSTA NEWS, January, 1941, 7, EKLSC.

³⁶ Ibid.

The Americanism struggle at Fortier High School provides only one example, but with half the states using loyalty oaths by 1941, the school is indicative of similar struggles going on throughout the country.³⁷ On the eve of war, the use of loyalty oaths helped promote a shared sense of identity in the United States. The fact that entities as wide ranging as the ACLU and various business groups would become so passionate over the topic proves how serious an issue both sides of the argument found it to be.

The country certainly came together after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Though the school board's Americanism Rule was used only against Sarah Reed, the culture which brought it to the public consciousness was still prevalent. The push for shared values suddenly expanded beyond loyalty oaths, as the United States was suddenly on the defensive. While Reed was fighting her own battles, a parallel debate over this expansion manifested itself in the institutionalization of physical education standards during the war, tying the mission of the loyalty oaths with the sudden militarization of the nation's male students.

The Many Trials of the Towles Sisters

The name Sarah Towles Reed has become synonymous with the push for education reform in New Orleans. These challenges were not only faced in Orleans Parish public schools in the 1930s, but throughout the country. A high school teacher known for her outspoken nature with regard to the rights of women, education reform, labor struggles, and civil rights, Reed became a beacon of light for her students and her peers, as well as a thorn in the side of the

³⁷ NOPSTA NEWS, January, 1941, 7, EKLSC.

school board.³⁸ While appearing before the school board, as she did often to protest actions she viewed as unjust, she was admonished for continuously seeking to “override the wishes of the electorate...by annoying, humiliating and embarrassing” members of the board.³⁹ It is also evident that the principal of Fortier High School, John R. Conniff, could not stand her.

After losing a bitter campaign to replace Warren Easton as Superintendent of Orleans Parish schools in 1910, Conniff spent the next two decades as Assistant State Superintendent of Education and President of Louisiana Polytechnic Institute in Ruston, Louisiana. He would go on to establish his legacy as the first principal of Alcee Fortier High School, serving in that position from 1931 to 1946.⁴⁰ Within the walls of Fortier High School, Conniff fought his battles against a changing culture, a perceived communist threat invading his school, and, more specifically, the sisters Roberta Towles and Sarah Towles Reed, who taught at the high school during most of his tenure.

Conniff did not mince words when he found someone who opposed his vision of education. He called the Teachers College of Columbia University, the allegedly liberal institution from which many of his teachers came, “one of the most weakening and damaging influences in American education.” When new textbooks were published containing what he viewed as the progressive ideals of “these so-called experts,” he dismissed them as being full of “new-fangled ideas.”⁴¹ At the heart of these rants was Conniff’s fear of a growing trend of change within the education system throughout the 1930s. New pedagogical emphasis on activities such as field trips, group projects concerning current events, and an increase in student

³⁸ Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, p. 2; see also Edith Ambrose, “Sara Towles Reed and the Origins of Teachers Unions in New Orleans,” MA thesis, University of New Orleans, 1991.

³⁹ Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Devore/Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, p. 145.

⁴¹ Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, p. 129.

participation during lectures, were viewed as “communistic” in their intent.⁴² This is a clear example of how the word “communist” was used as a blanket term applied to all efforts to reform a school program. A wave of progressive reform was being introduced to American schools during this decade, and even if he had little impact on other learning institutions, Conniff was determined to retain the “status quo” at his own school.⁴³

Conniff’s first clash with the Towles sisters came in February of 1938 when Roberta Towles was told she would be transferred to another school across town in two days. This transfer made little sense to Roberta, since not only did she live mere blocks away from Fortier, but it was also the middle of the term. Towles quickly demanded a meeting with the school board, where she claimed Conniff was trying to punish her for her teaching methods. Students in her class were encouraged to speak about current events and relate them to historical issues, a practice which Conniff warned the Teachers’ Federation allowed for “too much freedom in the classroom.”⁴⁴

The 1930s saw a great leap in the progressive classroom teaching methods Conniff so disdained. Towles was hardly the only teacher to employ constructive thinking exercises and classroom debates, as the traditional teaching methods of recitation and memorization were increasingly being discarded across the country.⁴⁵ Conniff’s mix of old-school educational philosophy and his disdain for the Towles’ sisters was all the inspiration he needed for taking action. Roberta Towles’ transfer served several functions for Conniff. For one, he separated the petulant sisters, theoretically minimizing their influence over the school and their students. More

⁴² Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, p. 129.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

⁴⁵ Kristi Wallace, “Making Citizens in the South: Louisiana’s Fight for Progressive Education reform in the 1930s,” MA thesis, University of New Orleans, 2006, p. 5.

important, however, he was putting other teachers on notice. Roberta Towles was a well-liked teacher in good standing who was abruptly uprooted from her classroom and essentially demoted in status. This act would certainly make other teachers - even those with a positive work history - uneasy about their own status. This was also the same year Conniff delivered his famous “loyalty” speech in which he described loyalty as “the most valuable quality that any human being can possess.” Though his words were mixed with the language of red-baiting, it was clear the Roberta Towles had failed in her duty to be loyal to her principal.⁴⁶

Sarah Reed and her sister Roberta first spurned Conniff’s “loyalty fetish” when they spoke out against his plans to form his own version of the ROTC in the 1930s. ROTC training had been voted against by the Orleans Parish School Board, and the two Reed sisters were soon viewed as constant threats. By 1941, Conniff had already charged Reed with “un-Americanism.” This prompted the school board to question her students on Sarah Reed’s teaching style and methods. Though it is documented that there was quite an amount of discussion on the matter of Reed’s approach to teaching Americanism, she was never officially charged with anything by the school board and continued teaching at Fortier.⁴⁷

Although America had found a powerful ally in the Soviet Union in the war against Nazism, the specter of communism was still considered a virulent threat throughout the nation. Not just school boards and civic organizations were seeing “red,” but local churches, especially the Catholic Church, was espousing the horrors of communism through its publications.⁴⁸ Even though the United States was willing to work with the Soviet Union against the Nazi threat,

⁴⁶ Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, p. 132.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 174.

⁴⁸ Kellie Reilley, “Leading the Anticommunist Crusade: New Orleans Catholic Action of the South as a Microcosm of Catholic Anticommunism, 1944-49,” MA Thesis, University of New Orleans, 2000, p. 2.

Americanism, often defined as anti-communism, had become the prism through which all activities were viewed. This only increased the paranoia of school principals like Conniff.

In 1943, Conniff finally found his chance to pounce on Reed when teachers were required to fill out forms detailing their after-school activities. He viewed it as his duty to ensure that his teachers were not taking part in any subversive groups or campaigns after school hours. During the war many teachers took on after-school jobs which were politically neutral and had no problem with filling out the questionnaire. Some teachers were members of unions, or other politically minded groups that might arouse suspicion in their superiors, and they simply wrote “NOTHING” when asked what their after-school activities entailed. Sarah Reed, of course, refused to write anything down on the questionnaire and simply returned it to the school’s office blank.⁴⁹

Conniff was livid at her clear nose-thumbing at his authority, yet he was probably thrilled to have a concrete act of “subversion” with which to nail her fate. When repeatedly asked to fill in the form, Reed simply replied that it was “none of the School Board’s business.” Soon thereafter, Conniff suspended Reed from teaching. Reed immediately sued and was supported by teacher and student petitions, the American Teachers Legion, and the Central Trades and Labor Council. Reed dismissed the charges as humorous and ridiculous. The school board could not find a reason to fire her, but they stood firm and finally charged her with “neglect of duty.”⁵⁰

Perhaps Conniff felt vindicated, but Reed returned to teaching at Fortier, and continued to do so for several years after the principal retired. Though her main opponent to her teaching methods was out of the picture, Reed faced further challenges in the last years of her tenure. The

⁴⁹ Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, p. 147.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

tone in Washington D.C. and the rest of the country concerning communism was changing in 1948. The end of World War II brought a new Soviet threat to America, and with that threat the specter of communism grew in ways never before imaginable. With the perceived threat of communist influence infiltrating American civic and educational systems, suspicion became an effective political tool to use against one's enemies and reared its ugly head once again. It took on a new life of its own throughout the country from Washington D.C. on down to the local high school level.⁵¹

The Republican led House Committee on Un-American Activities promised to expose Communists in the federal government. It essentially targeted the entire Truman Administration, holdovers of the Roosevelt New Deal Era, and pretty much any liberal politician up for re-election. Both sides knew in order to survive they had to play this game, and Truman used the Smith Act of 1940 to prosecute members of the American Communist Party in 1948, the same year HUAC successfully charged Alger Hiss with espionage.⁵² Again, with both sides of the political aisle decrying the communist threat, the fear of communist infiltration became the standard argument which all social and cultural changes were being measured. The educators of the youth of America were ready targets.

Sarah Reed, now sixty-six years old and in her final years of teaching, once again faced persecution for the teaching of anti-Americanism in the classroom. With the political climate as it was, the school board resurrected the 1941 accusations against Reed's teaching methods, and interviewed her current students about her class behavior. Though she was beloved by many, five allegations were lobbied against her, including one student complaining that "she always brought

⁵¹ Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, pp. 162-165.

⁵² Ibid., p. 165.

out the bad parts of our government” and another insisting that she “advocated the division of wealth in the country and advocated socialism.”⁵³ It was during this hearing that it came to light that the student who had leveled the first accusation against Reed in 1941 had been pressured by Conniff into coming up with a teacher who was not promoting democracy in the classroom. Reminiscent of HUAC hearings, Conniff used the threat of communism as an issue to hurt Reed whether the evidence was truthful or not. At the end of Reed’s hearings, throngs of supporters overwhelmed the School Board, and the Board was unable to fire Reed on the charge that she had “not emphasized the superiority of the American way of life over Communism.”⁵⁴ Reed finally retired in 1951 and, ironically, the Orleans Parish School Board which had persecuted her for so long, eventually named a local high school after her.

World War II and Physical Education

Physical Education classes are taken for granted by the modern day student for being a standard part of the school day, but this was not always the case. Through the first half of the twentieth century, one historian has noted that physical education was “relatively poor.” While the physical prowess of the nation’s youth had never been a top priority of the American government, the outbreak of war in the 1940s made it “overnight the first major requirement for a nation at war.” Essentially established to prime the boys of America for fighting overseas, the

⁵³ Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 175-176.

national Division of Physical Fitness set the rubric that students would be required to attend a “physical training program of one hour each day five days a week.”⁵⁵

Conniff served as principal of Fortier High School through the end of World War II. He used the remaining years in his leadership position to establish and push an ROTC program (against the wishes of the school board) to go beyond the institutionalized physical training program.⁵⁶ He envisioned his school as a beacon of Americanism. Though the United States and the Soviet Union had become allies during the war, the push to reinforce the ideal of Americanism grew stronger than ever. Conniff, still at the forefront of leading the loyalty brigade, strongly encouraged his students to enter the armed forces, starting with the Fortier ROTC program. Conniff described his philosophy of life as “duty, work, and play.” The first and key word on the list was clearly “duty.” In a pamphlet written at the end of his career at Fortier, Conniff elaborated on his philosophy of education. He stated that every American had a “moral obligation” to fulfill these duties, “duty to self, duty to his job, duty to his home, duty to his community, to his state, to his country, and duty to the Almighty.”⁵⁷

In November 1943, in an attempt to combine patriotism and duty as the primary principles at Fortier, Conniff distributed his pamphlet to the male students. Titled “Forward March! Wartime Information for the Fortier High School Boys,” the pamphlet linked the Fortier mascot, the Tarpon, with America’s greatness. “The tarpon, a giant of the sea, is the greatest American game fish universally known for its stubbornness and fortitude, symbolic of Fortier’s

⁵⁵ Earle F. Zeigler, *A History of Physical Education and Sport in the United States and Canada* (Champagne: Stipes Publishing Company, 1975), p. 82.

⁵⁶ Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) minutes, June 17, 1936, EKLSC.

⁵⁷ “Compendium of the Activities of The Alcee Fortier High School of New Orleans, LA.,” published 1948, Folder “Alcee Fortier Senior High School,” Box 1, “General Files,” EKLSC.

never-say-die spirit on the field of sports, in scholastic endeavors, and the outside world.”⁵⁸

Conniff’s desire to tie the “field of sports” with “the outside world” was solidified in Fortier’s physical fitness program, which included a voluntary “Military Training Unit” that utilized military exercises as dictated by the text *Military Science and Tactics: Elementary Training*, penned by Col. P.S. Bond of the United States Army. Students who did not volunteer for the military unit were still required to participate in “Drill,” a class on marching techniques. All male students at Fortier were also required to participate in a “Combatives” section, which included boxing, wrestling, and judo. These militaristic exercises combined with the more traditional track and field elements of physical education courses were intended, according to Jack Pizzano, Athletic Director at Fortier during World War II, to “satisfy the requirements of the military authorities in the physical conditioning of youth for service both as citizens and soldiers.”⁵⁹

Conniff’s belief in preparing his boys for war went beyond the normal patriotic purview of the Orleans Parish School Board. On June 12, 1936, the School Board debated the issue of starting a Reserve Officer Training Corps Unit, or R.O.T.C.U., at the behest of the National Defense Committee of the Association of Commerce, which had proposed that a program be started in New Orleans. R.O.T.C.U. programs were popping up throughout the country and the American public had yet to come to a decision of what the purpose of military training in public high schools would mean.⁶⁰ Five days after the initial debate, after hearing strong opinions on both sides of the matter, the School Board voted down the proposal.⁶¹ The issue seemed to be resolved until four years later, when Principal Conniff, dissatisfied with the OPSB response to

⁵⁸ “Pamphlet ‘Forward March! Wartime Information for the Fortier High School Boys,” Box “OPSB-147 Alcee Fortier Senior High School,” EKLSC.

⁵⁹ “Physical Fitness Manual written by Jack Pizzano, September, 1944,” Box “OPSB-147 Alcee Fortier Senior High School,” EKLSC.

⁶⁰ OPSB min., June 12, 1936, EKLSC.

⁶¹ OPSB min., June 17, 1936, EKLSC.

his earlier petition, decided to start a program at Fortier himself. According to school board records, the School Board responded to Conniff's request by sending him a letter stating that "up to the present time no action had been taken by the board in regard to organizing said unit." This obviously was not good enough for Conniff, who went ahead and organized the unit himself for the 1940-41 school year. This in turn led to an investigation by the School Board into the "province of the principal in matters of such importance."⁶²

During World War II, along with initiating the R.O.T.C. unit, Conniff also found a vehicle for his obsession with duty and loyalty in the state's Americanism Program, adopted in 1940 by the Louisiana legislature which continued through 1946. The program was divided among State, District, and Parish programs. The State Program was a statewide television broadcast throughout Louisiana once a month at 8:50 a.m. It generally included a recitation of the "Pledge to the Flag," singing of the Star-Spangled Banner, and an address on Americanism by the governor or lieutenant governor. The weekly District Program, which was considerably more involved, added skits and roundtable discussions to the program. Responsibility for the district program rotated among school districts and was prepared by the school districts' teachers. Every school day that was not accompanied by the morning state or district Americanism Program, was conducted by the school itself. The Parish Program was held under the auspices of each home room teacher in the school. In the case of Conniff's school, it included a "Pledge of Fealty to the State of Fortier." The purpose of the Americanism Program, as stated plainly in its program schedule, was "to awaken a general interest and loyalty to the U.S.A." This was certainly a goal Conniff whole-heartedly supported.⁶³

⁶² OPSB min., September 13, 1940, EKLSC.

⁶³ "Compendium of the Activities of The Alcee Fortier High School of New Orleans, LA.," published 1948, Folder "Alcee Fortier Senior High School," EKLSC.

Little HUACs and the Second Push for Americanism: Civil Rights, Vietnam, and The Cold War

Though Sarah Reed's fight was over by the end of the 1940s, America was still responding to a perceived Communist threat, and New Orleans public schools were still a battle ground on which the fight for Americanism continued. Civil justice and desegregation efforts were increasing in intensity in the American South during the late 1940s and 1950s, and red-baiting certainly cast a pall over debates on the issue. This era is commonly referred to as the McCarthy Era due to Senator Joseph McCarthy's national influence on anti-communist activities and his infamous inquiries into subversive activities in government and Hollywood. What is interesting about the experience in the American South during this period was how the rapid spread of communist witch-hunting stood in sharp contrast to the region's growing disapproval of McCarthy. By all accounts, the Senator from Wisconsin was at the height of his power and visibility in the early 1950s, but was viewed as an "intruder" within the framework of a longstanding southern history of antiradicalism.⁶⁴ Many viewed the South as essentially being under attack since Reconstruction, and this lingering resentment laid the subtext for this narrative.⁶⁵ Perhaps this is why anti-communism was so prevalent and McCarthy so unpopular on the local level in the southern states during a period of heightened racial and immigrant tension.⁶⁶

With the emergence of the Cold War, the post-war period certainly brought a renewed rise in anti-communism. This period saw the resurgence of House Un-American Activities Committee and its search for radicals in America as well as a trend among several states to create

⁶⁴ George Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace: Segregationists, Anticommunism, and Massive Resistance, 1945-1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), p. 8.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶⁶ Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace*, p. 8.

their own legislative committees to weed out “un-American activities.”⁶⁷ These “little HUACs” popped up in over a dozen states and imitated the hearings of the original HUAC in Washington, complete with hostile witnesses, names being named, and reputations being destructed. The beginnings of this trend are evident by the persecution of teachers in Louisiana in the years leading up to World War II.

Soon after the war, the South became a hotbed for these “little HUACs.”⁶⁸ Mississippi Senator John Raskin became a central member of HUAC along with Georgia’s John S. Wood. Both ushered in many of the tactics later used by McCarthy. The Democratic political machine in the South used red-baiting as its primary weapon against opponents and anti-segregationists. Senators Herman Talmadge (D-GA), Strom Thurmond (D-SC), and James O. Eastland (D-MS) gained notoriety for linking communism and the civil rights movements up to the 1960s. On the regional level, Louisiana District Attorney Leander Perez, who historian George Lewis describes as the “segregationist’s segregationist” ruled his racist “fiefdom” in Plaquemines Parish for thirty-five years and incessantly used red-baiting tactics to destroy civil rights proponents.⁶⁹

However, it is important to recognize that characterizing the whole of the American South and its people as supporters of such blatant political manipulation and racism is as inaccurate as pretending that the region’s politicians were not using such manipulations to their own ends. The fact remains that southerners had many different responses to the Cold War and the civil rights movement in the South. The two historic phenomena, anti-communism and the civil rights movement, become intertwined in unexpected and dangerous ways. Many southerners viewed their politicians’ red-baiting tactics as reprehensible and were perfectly

⁶⁷ M.J. Heale, *McCarthy’s American’s: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), p. 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace*, pp. 92-93.

capable of separating their mistrust of Soviet communism from domestic issues.⁷⁰ The very fact that such serious debates played themselves out through the American South shows just how polarized much of the population was on the issues. It is also disingenuous to assume that these tactics were being employed in the South and nowhere else. Michigan and Massachusetts are just two states which faced their own crises on the state and local levels, in high schools and universities, and in many ways the Louisiana narrative reflects those story-lines. By the same token, the American South, state by state, has a unique history in regard to race relations and isolationism, and the rhetoric of anti-communism and Americanism served as the chosen barometer through which the outcome of these events were gauged.

Though Senator McCarthy became both powerful and unwieldy enough to be censured by his Senate colleagues in 1954, he had no direct authority within the House Un-American Activities Committee, which continued its investigation into subversive activities within the country until its dissolution in 1957. Despite his indirect influence on HUAC, McCarthy's rabid red-baiting tactics provided the template with which regional authorities confronted their own "subversive entities" within their local communities.

By the 1950s, several states had set up their own "Little HUACs." With the advent of the Cold War and the Korean War, these found legitimacy in the public and private sphere due to the perceived ever-increasing threat of Communist infiltration within the state and nation at large.⁷¹

While these committees had their unique agendas and goals, their similarity to the national committee in Washington D.C. is unmistakable. In Louisiana, the Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities policed subversive representatives in the state and

⁷⁰ Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace*, pp. 92-93.

⁷¹ Heale, *McCarthy's Americans*, p. 21

enforced Americanism in the schools. Formed in the mid-1950s, the JLCUA fashioned itself after the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Consisting of five state senators and five state representatives, the committee sought to copy HUAC's successes while at the same time avoiding its blunders. In 1961 they asked Frank S. Tavenner, Jr., counsel to the House Un-American Activities Committee, to advise them on how to organize the JLCUA to protect Louisiana from any possible threat of communist influence. While somewhat general and vague, the memorandum JLCUA committee counsel Jack N. Rogers sent to the other members of the committee is fascinating in its assessment of possible pitfalls to avoid. First and foremost, Rogers instructed the membership to avoid the temptation of "condemning anyone who disagrees with us." The memorandum also made it clear that committee members were aware their position was not popular in many local circles. This became evident with Rogers' parenthesized side note that "our greatest danger here is the integration question, of course." He went on to declare that the committee must take care to expose communist front organizations without running the risk of making members of these organizations "martyrs" in the public eye. Instead, Rogers' memorandum declared the JLCUA must "bend over backward to make the committee the martyr." When juxtaposed with the fact that Senator McCarthy's public downfall had only occurred a few years prior, it is perhaps reasonable to surmise that this knowledge played an important role in the initial caution of the committee. Perhaps this is why the memorandum cautions investigators to never "infer" someone is a communist unless the committee could "pretty well prove Communist Party membership." The fact that Rogers alluded to integration

implies plans to investigate civil rights organizations, already tainting them with the possibility of communist associations before the investigations began.⁷²

Investigating civil rights organizations is certainly what the JLCUA did. There is a great amount of literature already written on the struggles of the civil rights movement within every state in the nation. In one instance the JLCUA targeted an organization and received blowback. After Senator McCarthy's censure, the "die-hard anti-radical congressmen" in Congress still targeted subversive groups, and the rise of the civil rights movement became their prime target.⁷³ Already, the rhetoric was growing that would "brand white integrationists as traitors," throwing them into the grab bag of undesirables labeled as communist sympathizers. Though civil rights organizations like the NAACP were certainly up for the challenge of battling injustices, the stigma of being branded as Communist for supporting the NAACP cause was viewed as a serious threat to gathering more support.⁷⁴ Many individuals who were proud of supporting integrationist causes, both black and white, were concerned with being "red-washed." At its convention in 1950, the NAACP membership overwhelmingly voted to internally survey possible communist infiltration within the ranks of the coalition's chapters.⁷⁵ Even supported by southern NAACP chapters, many civil rights activists were "purged" to smooth over this crisis of perception. Historian Greta de Jong makes the case that these purges released "many dedicated and experienced members that progressive causes could ill afford" to lose.⁷⁶

⁷² "Memorandum from Jack N. Rogers to All Members of the JLCUA," 10 April 1961, Folder "JLCUA 1961-1962," Box "Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities: 1962-67," Louisiana State Archives [LSA], Baton Rouge, LA.

⁷³ Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace*, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 143.

⁷⁶ Greta de Jong, *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 167.

One key example of how red-baiting alienated a civil rights organization on all sides is the experience of the “Southern Conference Educational Fund” (SCEF).⁷⁷ Anti-segregationist groups like the Southern Regional Council, the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, and the Southern Conference on Human Welfare had been dealing with opposition from white supremacists in their respective regions. Yet after SCEF was red-washed by HUAC, the NAACP turned their back on the organization as they were considered “pretty well labeled now.”⁷⁸

A pamphlet printed by SCEF in 1963 titled “House Un-American Committee, Bulwark of Segregation” outlined the injustices incurred by SCEF, as well as other civil rights groups in the South. Anne Braden, the pamphlet’s author, is a fascinating figure within civil rights history, as she was one of the movement’s most important white allies. After dealing with being charged with sedition in 1954, she continued her struggle for racial equality for decades to come.⁷⁹ In her booklet, Braden carefully laid out the pattern of advancements in integration, and how this was met with stiff resistance shrouded in the language of anti-communism. She directed attention to how HUAC first issued a report on the committee right after World War II, when post-war growth was predicting vast social change in the segregated American South. Curiously enough, anti-communist Stalwart Senator James Eastland of Mississippi attacked SCEF right before the Supreme Court’s ban on school segregation in 1954.

According to Braden, the most personal and unjustified attack came in 1963, when legislators arrested SCEF executive director James Dombrowski, SCEF treasurer and civil-rights lawyer Ben Smith, and his law partner Bruce Waltzer. Charged with subversion under the Communist Control Act, the charges were eventually dismissed by a state judge, only to be

⁷⁷ Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace*, p. 5

⁷⁸ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, p. 145.

⁷⁹ Catherine Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), pp. 156-60.

brought to the grand jury. The through-the-looking-glass moment in these charges illustrated the destructive pattern of red-baiting. The three activists were never charged with being communists, but only with being members of SCEF. The rationale was that SCEF was subversive because the conference had been “cited” by Eastland’s committee and HUAC, further assuring the men were guilty of subversion.⁸⁰ The precedent had been set years before by McCarthy. In cases of alleged communist subversion, guilt-by-association was common practice. In the context of the civil rights movement, guilt-by association was a common weapon used to fight integration.

Louisiana’s Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities, the state’s “little HUAC,” did not stop, however, at simply uncovering communist front organizations and subversive elements throughout Louisiana. It also decided to take a pro-active step in educating the public in what an acceptable form of political and cultural allegiance would look like. For the purpose of retroactive enforcement, it established the Americanism Division of the JLCUA in September of 1964.⁸¹

Communism was the model for an unacceptable form of government and social organization. The Americanism Division used the framework of defining Americanism by contrasting it to tenets of communism, essentially defining what it meant to be American by what it meant to *not* be communist. In a document submitted by Jack N. Rogers, committee counsel of the JCLUA on September 6, 1964, the outline of the purpose and strategy of the Americanism Division was clearly laid out. The operations plan assessed the purpose of the division as primarily of a public education function with a secondary function of carrying out the public relations work of the committee. The emphasis would be equally divided between an affirmative

⁸⁰ Booklet Titled “House Un-American Committee: Bulwark of Segregation,” Folder “Americanism Division/JLCUA 1964-65,” Box “Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities: 1962-67,” LSA.

⁸¹ “Memo from Jack N. Rogers to the Committee Chairman and Staff, JLCUA”, Folder “Americanism Division/JLCUA 1964-65”, Box “Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities: 1962-67”, LSA.

presentation of the basic principles of Americanism and American patriotism and a factual, documented statement of anti-communism. It should be oriented particularly toward a comparison of the two ideologies showing the basic values of Americanism and the comparable faults of the Communist system.⁸²

An attempt to “complement” the Department of Education’s Americanism program without stepping on its toes, the JLCUA’s Americanism program only further attempted to solidify the definition of American national identity in the negative, thereby it cemented the paradigm that Americanism in the form that was being espoused by the Division was nothing more than the opposite of Communism. This, of course, furthered a long tradition of consciously establishing a framework of American identity as being incessantly beset by enemy ideologies and forces.

Rogers’ memorandum goes on to state that the basic operations of the Americanism Division be implemented by the same tenets of the JLCUA, which included: “(A) Non-political Operations, (B) Consensus Approach to Everything, (C) Professional Staff, (D) Economy of Operations, (E) Positive Legal Authority, (F) Coordination with Existing Agencies, and (G) Security of Files and Information.”⁸³ The memorandum also laid out the plan of who should run the division, stating that it would need only two members: an “Americanism Director” and his secretary. The yet-to-be-named director, according to the memorandum, will ideally be “a professional public relations man with a background in press, radio or tv, with some experience

⁸² “Memo from Jack N. Rogers to the Committee Chairman and Staff, JLCUA”, Folder “Americanism Division/ JLCUA 1964-65”, Box “Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities: 1962-67”, LSA.

⁸³ Ibid.

in education. He should understand the State and National political situations and have a good background in both Americanism and Anti-Communism.”⁸⁴

Beyond credentials, it was imperative to the committee that they have “a young and personable personality.” The JLCUA found their man in Gary F. Tyler of Lake Charles, Louisiana. He continued the work of Colonel Fred Alexander, a retired army officer who had been appointed as staff director. Alexander had begun his work as the enforcer of Americanism in Louisiana in the early 1960s. Tyler served as the featured speaker for a variety of different local groups and civic organizations as varied as the Kiwanis Club, police officer organizations, the American Legion, as well as college “American Clubs.”

The focus of these speeches and meetings was to promote the advancement of the Americanism agenda as a grassroots activity, which citizens could take back home to their local communities. As Tyler so proudly pointed out in a memo to Col. Alexander, following one of these talks, “I have found that the people of our state are ready and willing to promote patriotism and Americanism within their individual communities. They are simply awaiting some leadership and a sound and workable program.” Tyler went on to state that his “entire program will be geared to enlist functioning local organizations to carry our programs.” His plan involved enlisting local “veterans organizations as well as ladies groups, church groups, [and] youth groups to actively and effectively promote patriotic and educational programs within their communities.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ “Memo from Jack N. Rogers to the Committee Chairman and Staff, JLCUA”, Folder “Americanism Division/JLCUA 1964-65”, Box “Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities: 1962-67”, LSA.

⁸⁵ “Proposed Program for Americanism Division,” 30 January 1965, Folder “Americanism Division/JLCUA 1964-1965,” Box “Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities 1962-67,” LSA.

Certain African-American groups' own desire to fight communism led the Americanism Division to court their support in the 1960s. Gary Tyler himself wrote of his experience in Patterson, Louisiana, in one of his weekly reports in February 1965. Speaking to "a negro post" of the American Legion, Tyler described the meeting as a "most significant" speaking engagement as it gave him the opportunity to speak to fifty African-Americans in the community and one school board representative. In fact, he was pleased that the Legion head, a pharmacist named Smith, was prepared to arrange a "panel-type forum for negro high school students" to push the Americanism agenda. Tyler was also invited by the school board member to "return to Patterson to speak to the student body of the white high school."⁸⁶

Tyler's talks throughout Louisiana were significant, and the ripple effects throughout the community were evident. Though not part of the Department of Education, the meetings were regularly attended by male members of high social standing in the communities. Equally important, their wives were often present.

Two decades earlier, Principal Conniff had noted the influence of social and business leaders, especially in regard to education. In a 1938 speech to teachers and students regarding eliminating communist influences in Fortier High School, Conniff had praised as his influence a local businessman, who had organized and taken to the airwaves deriding possible subversive influences in the community. Groups like The Young Men's Business Club had clearly influenced the Orleans Parish School Board with the "Americanism Rule" of 1940. And now, at the height of the Cold War, the perceived need for a vigilant grassroots watchdog to continue this kind of public scrutiny and enforce Americanism in the state could spell real and tangible

⁸⁶ "Weekly Report for Week Beginning Monday, Feb. 8, 1965," from Gary Tyler, Americanism Director, to Col. Fred Alexander, Staff Director of the Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities, Folder "Americanism Division/JLCUA 1964-1965," Box "Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities 1962-67," LSA.

success for the JLCUA's mission to fight communist and subversive influences in every shape and form.

In March of 1961, the Louisiana Legislature passed its own laws to teach high school students the dangers of communism and to develop "deep loyalty to our American political and economic system." Intended as a segment of the American History course given to eleventh and twelfth grade students over a six week period, the Fortier Senior High School student newspaper described the course as a "unit of instruction in the dogmas and tenets of Americanism as opposed to the deceitful and destructive doctrine of Communism." Running the headline "Battle Against Communism To Be Waged in High School," the article written by a student makes it clear that the class was not intended to teach about different forms of government as much as it was a call to arms to "show why Communism and Socialism are evil and destroy the freedom, well being, dignity, and happiness of the individual."⁸⁷

Harkening back to what had been the ideal fomented during the Second World War, namely that high schools should be utilized as training grounds for good citizens, this discourse mimicked the call made by the National Education Association in 1948 for schools to "indoctrinate our youth in the American way of life so that they know it, believe in it, and live it continuously."⁸⁸ These mandatory courses were merely a means to an end. In 1961, the Louisiana Legislature went beyond its anti-communist rhetoric and used confrontational language to justify for the program, stating that the purpose of educating eleventh and twelfth graders was to "combat and defeat the Communist conspiracy."⁸⁹

⁸⁷ "Silver and Blue." Student Newspaper, March 21, 1961, Folder "Alcee Fortier Senior High School", EKLSC.

⁸⁸ Parr, *A Will of Her Own*, p. 171.

⁸⁹ "Silver and Blue." Student Newspaper, March 21, 1961, Folder "Alcee Fortier Senior High School", EKLSC.

The push for promoting Americanism in schools, driven by the communist ascendancy, was stronger than ever in the 1960s. The specter of communism evolved into the fear of an actual communist threat. The argument can be made that the real threat of nuclear war compounded by events such as the launch of Sputnik and the Cuban Missile Crisis caused a sudden upsurge in resolutions to teach about the virtues of Americanism and the evils of communism. The Cold War was scarier than ever for the American public.⁹⁰

In 1960, a resolution came before the Louisiana legislature “designed to institute a method of instruction for the youth of Louisiana in the dogmas and tenets of Americanism and to develop intelligent and aggressive opposition to communism and deep loyalty to our American political and economic system.” This resolution in essence allowed the state legislature to mandate an Americanism course that taught the evils of communism; the curriculum was completely dictated by the state government.⁹¹

Richard I. Miller’s *Teaching About Communism* was the basic text from which many of the courses on communism drew their curricula. Published in 1966 by McGraw-Hill, the book broke down its content by grade, and painstakingly detailed exactly which activities and subjects were appropriate for every class level. Miller tried to wade through the different perceptions concerning communism and balanced his proposed syllabi between actual Bolshevik and Soviet history, and the varied philosophies of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. Miller saw the world as teetering on the edge between civilization and chaos. He prefaced his guide by declaring that the human race had “never before [had] so many forces combined in a single era to provide such great

⁹⁰ For more insight into nuclear fears in Louisiana, see also Gregory J. Schloesser, “The Bomb on the Bayou: Nuclear Fear and Public Indifference in New Orleans, 1945-1964,” MA thesis, University of New Orleans, 2010.

⁹¹ Richard I. Miller, *Teaching About Communism* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966) p. 267.

opportunities as well as such great perils.”⁹² Writing his book was a mission to save the planet with knowledge in the most precarious of times. His belief in the usefulness of educating the youth of America about its enemy is summed up in Miller’s quotation of Admiral William C. Mott, who “declared that amateur anticommunists are about as useful as amateur brain surgeons.”⁹³ Though not published until 1966, *Teaching About Communism* gathered information on many anti-communism programs already being implemented as well as a compendium of various state resolutions on the teaching of communism. Its greatest achievement, however, is further standardizing the curricula which was used well into the 1970s.

One result of the 1960 Louisiana resolution described in Miller’s book was the founding of the “Americanism vs. Communism” Seminar, which was broadcast to Louisiana students on May 9, 1967, from 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. Moderated by Shreveport television news editor Dave McCellan, the state-wide broadcast was a three hour presentation resembling a musical variety show with a message. There were several lectures with titles such as “The Communist Plot to Destroy America” and “What Is Patriotism?”. These segments were presented by famed counter-intelligence spy master for the FBI Herbert Philbrick and Lake Charles State Senator Jesse M. Knowles. The program was punctuated by high school choirs singing patriotic songs in the vein of “America The Beautiful,” and the program concluded with a “Flag Pageant.” It also included various speeches such as “The Dignity of the Individual” and “Communism and Athletics.” The presence of Louisiana governor John J. McKeithen added the legitimacy and gravitas needed to produce the seminar and made it mandatory for all Louisiana High School

⁹² Miller, *Teaching About Communism*, p. 1.

⁹³ Ibid., p.5.

students. The intended effect was to juxtapose the horrors of communism with its proposed antithesis, the glories of Americanism.⁹⁴ (See Figure 1.)

The response to this program by trained historians in Louisiana's universities was largely unfavorable. When asked to critique the Americanism Program and to make suggestions as to how to improve the seminar, Bennet H. Wall, Tulane University professor of History, pointed out the fallacy of defining the American system of government by "the things which it opposes."⁹⁵ Wall, along with several other history professors asked to evaluate the program pointed out the trap of Americanism being defined as merely the antithesis of the enemy's identity. As is evident through every stage of the Red Scares in America, Americanism kept changing because of the changing nature of the antagonists. In the nineteenth century, the enemies were radical unionization, immigration, or desegregation, but these straw men were rotated out for whatever the contemporary social concerns happened to be. The battle against communism would be validated once again by the trials of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

One former teacher, Betty Field, at a local New Orleans high school recounted her experience of travelling to a farmer's union outpost outside of Bunkie, Louisiana for an anti-communist conference sponsored by the Superintendent of State Education. A tedious four day experience, the educator described an endless pattern of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, listening to speeches, and singing the National Anthem. After several days of this monotony, Ms. Field and a friend ended up skipping part of the conference to attend a movie. Only after her return to school did Ms. Field realize that she was only bestowed the "honor" of being selected to

⁹⁴ Americanism vs. Communism Seminar Program, May 9, 1967, Folder "Americanism vs. Communism Seminar: May 9-September 28, 1967," Box 1, "General Files," EKLSC.

⁹⁵ Letter from Bennet H. Hall to Malcom Rosenberg, July 12, 1967, Folder "Americanism vs. Communism Seminar: May 9-September 28, 1967," Box 1, "General Files," EKLSC.

Figure 1.

**AMERICANISM VS.
COMMUNISM
SEMINAR STATE-WIDE
TELEVISION BROADCAST**

**May 9, 1967
9:00 A.M.-12:00 Noon**

9:00
Introduction of Seminar Moderator: Dave McCellan
News Editor , KTAL-TV Shreveport

Greetings from Moderator

"The Star Spangled": Ouachita Parish High
School Band, Monroe, directed by Jack White

Seminar Opening Remarks: Honorable John J. Mc-
Keithen, Governor of Louisiana

Remarks: Honorable William J. Dodd, State Superin-
tendent of Education

"Pledge of Allegiance" and "This is my country":
North Caddo High School Choir, Vivian, directed by
Robert H. Ferrington

9:15

Introduction of Herbert Philbrick, Former Counter
Spy for Federal Bureau of Investigation

"Why Communism Concerns You": Herbert Philbrick

9:45

"Patriotic Fantasy" and "The Stars and Stripes For-
Ever": Lafayette High School Band, Lafayette, di-
rected by Harry Greig

"What is Patriotism?": Senator Jesse M. Knowles,
Lake Charles

"America's Free Enterprise System": G.A. Penni-
Man, Shreveport

"The Constitution": Charles deGravelles, Lafayette

"You're a Grand Old Flag" and "Ceremony of Alle-
giance": Peabody High School Band, Alexandria
Directed by Claude D. Andrews

10:15

"Communism and Athletics": Alvin Dark, manager
Kansas City Athletics Professional Baseball Club

"Education-Americanism vs. Communism": Dr. Wil-
liam F. Beyer, Jr., State Department of Education

"Communism and Religion": Sam Orchard, Monroe

"God Bless America" and "American Patrol": La-
Grange High School Band, Lake Charles, directed by
Perry Dennis

10:45

"The Dignity of the Individual": Dr. R. Gordon Hol-
combe, Jr., Lake Charles

"Communism and Law": George C. Gibson, New Or-
leans

"Communism and the News": Jesse R. Ragan, Shreve-
Port

"America The Beautiful": Ouachita High School Band,
Monroe, directed by Jack White

11:00

"The Communist plot to Destroy America": Herbert
Philbrick

11:30

Introduction of the "FLAG PAGEANT": Mack
Avants, State Department of Education

"FLAG PAGEANT": by Naval Basic Training Command,
Pensacola, Florida

Closing Remarks by Seminar Moderator

Source: Americanism vs. Communism Seminar Program, May 9, 1967, Folder "Americanism vs.
Communism Seminar: May 9-September 28, 1967," EKLSC.

attend this conference after several people had first turned it down. This is just one of many anecdotes that illuminate the indoctrinating processes which many educators had to go through during the Cold War.⁹⁶

The severity of the “Communism-as-National-Threat” narrative is only demonstrated when one looks at the regional differences between the textbooks employed during the 1960s. During this time, more school districts throughout the country were starting to teach about the nature of communism in their history courses. *Time Magazine* did a comparative analysis in January 1963 of the different curricula growing out of the new focus on communism education. While praising the prep schools like Exeter and Andover for their ability to “weave facts about communism into regular history,” *Time* targeted Louisiana as one of the “worst” examples of a Communism program on the state level. It derided the state for its desire to “indoctrinate rather than illuminate.” Quoting one of the educators in Louisiana, the high school students were being taught that “all Russians are our mortal enemies [...] working day and night to destroy America.”⁹⁷ The *Time* article was written during a period of heightened Cold War paranoia. Just how balanced textbooks such as *The Masks of Communism*, *The Meaning of Communism*, and J. Edgar Hoover’s *A Study of Communism* actually were certainly deserves further analysis. It is telling, however, that during a time when any class on Communism accentuated the negative, the fact that Louisiana’s curriculum was considered to be particularly obtuse shows how vitriolic the state’s teaching methods and patriotic enforcement of Americanism were.⁹⁸

The language employed by the JLCUA repeated the mantra proposed by arbiters of Americanism for decades that America’s youth was the promoters of communism’s principal

⁹⁶ “Personal oral history with Betty Field,” February 24, 2011.

⁹⁷ “Textbooks-Better Well-Read Than Red,” *Time*, January 26, 1963.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

target. In a speech Col. Alexander gave to the Kappa Delta Sorority on January 8, 1962, entitled “Youth - A Prime Target of Communist Infiltration,” and repeated often in the future, he honed in on the fears of parents in the audiences, who felt that their own children were targets for communist subversives. Alexander cited an anonymous member of “the Party’s National Executive Committee” who stated that “there has been a breakthrough as far as young people are concerned, particularly in colleges where students want to know what communism is.” Alexander pointed out that the Communist Party USA had launched “a major campaign with youth as its target.” He then coupled these remarks with the declaration that young communists were seeking to “exploit such controversial issues on campuses as civil rights, academic freedom, and other so-called peace issues.”⁹⁹

By blaming certain subversive forces within the student activist movements devoted to civil rights and ending the war in Vietnam, Alexander was able to indict everyone associated with the movement. If the forces of brainwashing were being employed by communist conspiracies in America, then certainly a parent’s naïve child was a target. The effectiveness of this message’s influence became clear when one analyzes how the Louisiana system of public schools, and especially Alcee Fortier High School, handled Vietnam War protests and the civil rights movement on campus.

At one point, the JLCUA met solely to blame racial conflict in the state on the promotional effort of the Communist Party. Drawing on the testimony of ex-Communist Party member Manning Johnson, several organizations throughout the American South, including the Southern Regional Conference, were targeted for alleged communist ties. Little HUACs like Louisiana’s sprang up in states as diverse as California and Ohio, which started the Ohio Un-

⁹⁹ “Silver and Blue,” Student Newspaper, March 21, 1961, Folder “Alcee Fortier Senior High School,” EKLSC.

American Activities Commission (or OUAC). The purpose and intent of the Louisiana version of HUAC was to investigate Communist influence in government and the state at large. However, it became increasingly evident that the committee was more interested in investigating those who supported integration rather than rooting out those with ties to the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁰

By the 1960s, suspicion of civil rights activists was not restricted to Louisiana and the American South. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover became unnerved by the civil rights movement, culminating in his response to Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington in 1963. This huge event made Hoover realize that the civil rights movement was not going away any time soon.¹⁰¹ After the famous march, the focus of the FBI switched from investigating communist influence in government to what historian Kenneth O'Reilly refers to as the "communists-in-the-civil-rights-movement-issue."¹⁰²

The 1960s proved to be the greatest battle ground for Americanism in public schools and universities. White elites increasingly hoped that even though integration had led to their teacher population growing more diverse than ever, African-American teachers would still "condemn radicalism in all forms."¹⁰³ Even "Negro History Week" was watered down by omitting black figures in American history who were viewed as "un-American." While such historic leaders as Nat Turner and Harriet Tubman were passed over for less controversial figures such as George Washington Carver and Crispus Attucks.¹⁰⁴ With the Communist Party viewed as courting

¹⁰⁰ Heale, *McCarthy's Americans*, pp. 260-261.

¹⁰¹ Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), pp. 126-127.

¹⁰² O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, pp. 126-127.

¹⁰³ Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 341.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

African-Americans, the fear of communism cast a pall over the civil rights movement across the country.

Taking a cue from his predecessor as well as from J. Edgar Hoover, Fortier Principal Joseph S. Schwartz, Sr. in 1969 published a pamphlet that lumped together the civil rights movement along with other “radical” student organizations, and branded them all as communists. Available for purchase at a cost of twenty-five cents, the pamphlet, titled “Student Unrest at Fortier Senior High School” outlined Schwartz’s experience with members of “Students for Democratic Society” who rigorously promoted anti-Vietnam War and anti-segregation policies outside of Fortier. Quoting J. Edgar Hoover, the authority on communism, Schwartz claimed that “Communists are actively promoting and participating in the activities of this organization, which is self-described as a group of liberals and radicals.”¹⁰⁵

The pamphlet quickly turned to the civil rights issue, as Schwartz recounted being petitioned by students attempting to start a “Black Student Union” to represent African-American students in dealing with the administration. Finally enforced since 1967, Fortier was already in its second year of integration by 1969. Schwartz cleverly applied the new integration doctrine to disallow the union from forming. He argued that a group like the “Black Student Union” would be formed “on a segregated basis,” which was not allowed at the school. The pamphlet ended with a call to parents to watch their children and keep them from participating in student demonstrations, which were beginning to “disturb the entire school.” But the subtext to Schwartz’s examination of student protest was quite evident. In six short pages he was able to link communist subversion and anti-Americanism with the NAACP, anti-Vietnam protestors,

¹⁰⁵ “Student Unrest At Fortier Senior High School”, by Joseph S. Schwartz, Sr., 1969, Folder “Alcee Fortier High School”, EKLSC.

Fortier's own African-American students, the new country-wide inclusion of black historic figures in textbooks, and skipping school. Alluding to comments from J. Edgar Hoover and using the images of university unrest in other parts of the country, Schwertz attempted to legitimize his claims that subversive ideologies were more prevalent than ever in his high school.¹⁰⁶ It appears evident that even though Conniff had long since retired, his "loyalty fetish" was still very much alive at Fortier High School in the late 1960s, only now the civil rights movement was serving as the enemy and being painted with the brush of communist subversion.

Conclusion

While the Cold War may be over, and the fear of Communist infiltration has been replaced largely by the new specter of Islamic terrorism, the use of Americanism has remained an easy and effective weapon in most battles concerning changes of a political or social nature. Every four years the election cycle brings to the public's attention a slew of possible presidential candidates, yet also recycles the same rhetoric of American exceptionalism versus anti-Americanism. Harkening back to the elections of 1948, politicians and vocal citizens accused liberals of wanting to usher in a new age of socialism and communism. The left invariably used the same rhetoric when playing up the fear of conservative candidates bringing to Washington authoritarian governance in the vein of the Third Reich. These pejoratives, when seen on a protest sign or heard on the House floor, appear as if they represent the natural order of the

¹⁰⁶ "Student Unrest At Fortier Senior High School", by Joseph S. Schwertz, Sr., 1969, Folder "Alcee Fortier High School", EKLSC.

political culture in America. But it is easy to forget that they have their origins in the Red Scares of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

The reasoning behind such tactics being omnipresent in a post-Cold War American society is obvious in the simple fact that they have worked so effectively during the two previous Red Scares. Years of Americanism being defined in terms of what it opposes rather than for what it stands has brought forth a culture in which politicians focus their political dialogue on red-baiting their opponents. Citizens have begun to accept this conflicted paradigm as static and appropriate. The most telling factor is how the Soviet threat collapsed by 1991, yet the fear of communism remains a potent political force. This only reinforces Leffler's thesis that Americans were more frightened of their fellow citizens than concerned with the threat of the Soviet Union.

The curriculum battle still rages on, as is evident in the Texas State Board of Education debate over changing textbook guidelines from what is perceived to be a gradual shift to a "left-leaning emphasis" in American History textbooks to a more "balanced syllabus," including rehabilitating Senator Joseph McCarthy's image and reflecting the ideology of the Moral Majority and the National Rifle Association.¹⁰⁷ It appears that the pendulum is shifting once again toward an era in which American exceptionalism becomes the focus of Americanism education. The importance of the textbook debate in Texas must be appreciated for the fact that Texas, as the largest purchaser of textbooks in the country, can dictate what large segments of America will teach its children. This episode illustrates how the battle over Americanism is being fought in American high schools every day.

¹⁰⁷ Ron Briley, "The Texas State Board of Education History Standards: A Teacher's Perspective", in George Mason University's History News Network, March 29, 2010 <http://www.hnn.us/articles/124806.html> (accessed 7 April 2010).

The experience of Fortier High School, Louisiana, the American South, and the entire country during the two Red Scares after World War I and II can be viewed as unique within their own historical contexts. This study is as much an analysis of the history of emotion as it is a study of cultural battles at the grassroots level. The fear of communism, or the fear of anything for that matter, is a difficult subject to analyze for the very reason that fear is nearly impossible to define. This ambiguity has clearly expressed itself in American History in the nation's attempt to define its own identity by negative reference to the specter of communism. This paradigm is essentially flawed for many reasons and clouds those faced with making serious judgments concerning the changing culture in America and how its youth should respond to these changes. Historian John Dower made the astute observation when describing the lead-up to World War II and the Iraq War when he explains that once the wheels are in motion, it is nearly impossible to stop: "Language and rhetoric themselves become a prison, and the machinery of destruction has its own momentum."¹⁰⁸ The same concept applies here. It is easy to forget that words and emotions matter, but within the trajectory of the Americanism narrative, they are everything. The pattern of the anti-communist discourse begun in the mid-nineteenth century weaving through American history is evident in the language of John R. Conniff, Fred Alexander, and Joseph S. Schwartz, Sr. Different generations have produced its enforcers of Americanism in Louisiana by juxtaposing it to communism. It is remarkable how many people, like Sarah Reed and Anne Braden, have resisted falling into this trap and have used its ambiguous basis to illustrate the inequities in the system. Perhaps the effect of the Red Scares, as well as the response of citizens, has changed and will continue to change, yet the framework through which this will happen has clearly already been set.

¹⁰⁸ John W. Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor: Hiroshima: 9-11: Iraq* (New York: Norton, 2010), p.101.

Americanism has been defined as merely the antithesis of its enemy. After World War I and the ascent of communism around the world, the enemy of Americanism became communism. Americanism juxtaposes every cultural struggle by labeling it with the taint of communist influence. Any hint of change can be perceived as a threat to shared American values. The social movements change, but the language of Americanism and anti-communism remain static.

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Betty Field, in discussion with the author, 24 February 2011.

Vita

Ryan Prechter was born on March 23, 1982 in New Orleans, Louisiana. After graduating from Benjamin Franklin High School in 2000, he attended the University of Texas at Austin for three years, transferring in 2004 to study English at the University of New Orleans. After being displaced by Hurricane Katrina, he studied at the University of Orleans in France, where he fell in love with the study of history and the world. He thusly changed his major and returned to UNO, where he received a degree in International Studies in spring of 2009. That fall, he entered the masters program in History at UNO and graduated in May 2011.